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AUTHOR McCormack, Patricia M.
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ABSTRACT

Education may promote the development of students' whole-person identity formation--the spiritual, psychological, social, emotional, and intellectual. This paper considers how identity formation and self-esteem are related, how parents form the foundation for identity, and how teachers can contribute to further growth. Erikson's theory of psychological development and Lickona's theory of identity formation are used as the basis for discussion. Part 1 of the paper focuses on practices of home and school that foster the foundational elements of security, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Part 2 identifies how characteristics of the home environment nurture positive identity formation through effective communication, consistency, accountability, and a value-clarifying atmosphere. Part 3 describes mechanisms of school behavior that are related to the foundational issues of self-esteem and achievement, especially through holding high, but realistic, expectations for students. Part 4 deals with how the school environment can support positive identity formation through establishing systems that support success, using appropriate direction of student progress, setting realistic goals based on developmental readiness, teaching children how to manage time, moving toward increasing student independence, equipping children with skills needed to achieve expectations, holding children accountable for responsible school practices, and providing opportunities to apply their learning. (Contains 13 references.) (KB)

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PARENTS AND TEACHERS: PARTNERS IN WHOLE-PERSON FORMATION

Sr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM, Ed.D.

Parents, educators, newscasters and social workers suggest that poor self-esteem is at the root of failure, destructive tendencies, interpersonal stresses, inadequate academic achievement, personal powerlessness, drug abuse, and mediocrity. In my research and in encounters with student populations today I find that the identity of too many children is shaky, missing, negative or handicapped and it is adversely affecting classroom goals. Academic work and the social bonding necessary to community building is harder to achieve; soul formation is more difficult to address. Soul formation is fundamental to humanization; intellectual development is but one aspect of a person. True education promotes the identity formation of the whole person: the spiritual, psychological, social, emotional and intellectual person. Whole person identity formation is essential to the welfare of society and requires the attention and informed efforts of parents and teachers. Identity formation is crucial to conscience formation, moral attitudes, spiritual development, pro-social behavior, healthy relationships, and personal accomplishment.

Identity is defined by who I am over time, in repeated circumstances and with a variety of people. The value that I place on my perception of myself is called self-esteem. In other words, I define myself as a particular kind of person with strengths, limitations, and capabilities. If I am at peace with or energized by my definition or perception of myself, then I might say that I have positive self-esteem; I respect myself; I appreciate, value, or approve of the self that I believe I am. I am then comfortable with who I am and I do not try to become a carbon copy of others. I recognize and choose what qualities of

others and environments are most beneficial to my self growth. When I look at my identity, I like it. I am at home with myself. I accept my identity as God's plan for me and I am willing to work with it and develop it and grow into the fullness of the person that I was created to be. If, on the other hand, I dislike my perception of myself or want to reject it or dis-own it, then I might say that I have negative self-esteem or poor self-esteem.

Identity formation is at the heart of self-esteem because self-esteem is the by-product of the identity formed. It develops not from what is outside of me but from what is inside of me. When I look at this person that I think I am, do I like what I see? Does it bring a sense of rightness? If I saw you the way that I view me, would I like you, respect you, want to be like you, or want you to be one of my friends? A body of scholars from the psychological community including Abidin, R. (1982), Adler (1927), Coopersmith (1967), Dinkmeyer & McKay (1989), Dreikurs (1958, 1964), Erikson (1985), and Lickona (1985) suggested that identity formation which results in positive self-esteem has a foundation built upon the elements of personal security (trust), autonomy (self-reliance), initiative (self starter), and industry (follow through). Parents establish the foundation for identity through parenting practices that support growth in those elements. Teachers contribute to growth in identity and positive self-esteem when their interaction, classroom practices and teaching strategies provide student exercise in those same foundational factors.

Psychologists believe that security is the foundation for the psycho-social development that is essential to spiritual development, academic development and social interaction. The development of security begins at birth, and possibly within the womb. **Security** means that a child has a sense of trust, safety and confidence that his needs will receive predictable response from the significant people in his life. Once a child feels secure, he can dare to try new things, to reach out, to challenge himself; to face the challenge of others. Although the primary focus of the first two years of life, the need for growth in security extends to all stages of our growth. Security is always in need of

maintenance, if not remediation or strengthening. If security develops within a child, *drive* and *hope* evidence themselves. In too many cases students demonstrate the lack of drive and hope to a handicapping ability. Children need to have a developing sense of security in order to be capable of hoping, trusting, and developing in faith. About age two, the challenge to develop as an autonomous person becomes the focus in child development.

Autonomy means that the child demonstrates a sense of healthful independence, self reliance, inner authority, and the capability of making appropriate decisions for herself.

Such a child does not need a policeman or overseer in order to choose appropriate behaviors that are truly good and healthy. The adult is happy to observe the actions of the child and able to praise the independent choices that are made. If a sense of autonomy takes root, *self control* and *will power* become characteristics of the child. Pre-school and kindergarten years shift focus to the development of initiative. **Initiative** involves a sense of being a self starter, having interior motivation and the ability to originate plans, get my own ideas, and conquer tasks. When the teacher announces an upcoming project or a science faire, the child who is developing a sense of initiative is excited about the possibilities. The child whose initiative has not developed adequately communicates the attitude of "Where would I begin?" or, worse yet, "I may as well not even start because I won't stand a chance." When we help a child to grow in initiative we are gifting her with *direction* and *purpose*. She becomes a goal setter, capable of owning her own life and choices. The major psychological function that needs to develop within a child during the elementary school years, between the ages of 6 and 12 is **Industry**, that is: follow through, sticking to a task, getting a job done, accomplishing, having a sense of being able to move on to the next step or phase of a project, being diligent, and having a systematic approach to tasks and responsibilities. A developing sense of industry yields *method* and *competence*; the lack of industry results in feelings of inferiority which cripple.

Developing and furthering growth in initiative and industry is the central task of the elementary school years. The development of leadership and academic excellence implies

growth in initiative and industry. And yet, it is around this very issue that adversarial attitudes arise between parents and teachers. Schools know the need to provide abundant exercise in the practice of initiative and industry but that value is not recognized or able to be named or cultivated into life-giving skills by some parents. At times, when the school attempts to cultivate self starters and students with system, stick-to-it-tiveness, and the ability to accept and own consequences that result from choices, parents accuse the school of imposing adulthood on adolescents, distilling the fun of youth, and ruining the self-esteem of children. At times such as these it may prove helpful to articulate the foundational elements of identity formation and the school connection between the practice in question and the element associated with it. For example, a long range project divided into several parts and check-in points along the way is an exercise that encourages industry. In an attempt to help parents and teachers to know the connection between parent/teacher practices and the development of positive identity within children of elementary school age, four topics will be discussed: (1) practices of home and school that foster the foundational elements of security, autonomy, initiative, and industry; (2) characteristics of the home environment that nurture positive identity formation; (3) mechanics of school behavior that are related to the foundational issues of self-esteem and achievement; and (4) how the school environment can support positive identity formation, particularly related to the qualities of initiative and industry within children of elementary school age.

Practices of Home and School that Foster the Foundational Elements of Identity Formation

93 students from kindergarten to grade twelve who displayed positive self-esteem on a consistent basis were the focus of recent research. Each child was represented by at least one parent in five evenings of grade-level sharing around the topics associated with identity formation. Independent of each other the parents wrote the practices that they used during the previous year that might explain why their child displayed security, autonomy, initiative and industry on a consistent basis. Those practices were then shared with the

participating grade-level parents. The result was that the participating parents had similar parenting practices. Highlights of this research were published by Today's Catholic Teacher (McCormack, 1997 A & B, 1996 A & B). The ideas are simple and give parents an opportunity to know what it is that they can do to establish the elements of identity formation within their children and how other parents do it. Once a parent knows what to aim at, he can figure out his own way of getting there and, to help along the way are the suggestions of the 93 families who were part of the research.

Psychological literature and the parents who participated in the research suggested that **security** can be produced in classroom or home if there is consistent practice of routine, procedure, system, safety, consistency, continuity over time, similar expectations of caregivers, predictability, demonstration that what you say is what you do; that you say what you mean and mean what you say. Internal independence, self-reliance or **autonomy** is developed by practices that give a child opportunities to be responsibly independent. Letting a child do tasks on his own and accepting the consequences of his actions contributes to ownership. Let children be self-governing; whatever a girl can do for herself, she should do. When adults do for a child what he can do for himself, they weaken his sense of autonomy. Self control, respectful assertiveness, knowing what to say and the way to say it in order to best accomplish the intended goal are all ways of moving towards autonomous behavior. Holding a child accountable for her choices and their consequences is essential to the development of positive autonomy. Praise effort more than result because we know that we do not always have control over all the pieces to a product or factors in a result. We need to teach a child that it is effort that is most important; it is only the effort that she can control. When she gives her best effort, regardless of the product or final outcome, she will have a sense of integrity, rightness and a willingness to try again. If she only goes by the product, she is setting herself up for failure. **Initiative** is developed by exposing a child to a variety of experiences and opportunities, and by adult modeling of recovery after a mistake. After you make a

mistake, do you model that you can accept it, grow from it, live through it, let it be a stepping stone or is it the end of the world? What does the observing child learn from you when you make a mistake? Does he learn that every mistake has the potential of becoming a positive factor in formation? Provide a child with the tools, skills, or resources that are needed; walk through a project with her; but let the choice and results belong to the her. Use the term resourcefulness as a buzz word. Encourage risk taking and when results are less than desired, ask: "What did you learn in the process? What did you learn this time that you can apply to the next project?" Value freedom that is tempered with responsibility, accountability, and consequences. Teach a child that his freedoms stop when they impinge on the freedoms of another. Establish basic standards and deadlines and keep to them. For the good of a child's development, both parents and teachers must help children to learn to meet deadlines or accept whatever consequences result. Finally, the major function to be developed between grades one through eight is the sense of industry. **Industry** is developed through practices that involve steady care, as in the care of a pet, a particular responsibility every two days or at every lunch time, or once a week on a given day, productivity, accomplishment, publishing/posting completed projects, and maintaining a performance portfolio that demonstrates production and accomplishment over time. If a child volunteers for inclusion in a sports team or activity, he needs to fulfill the meeting and practice responsibilities rather than quit during the season. In other words, industry is accomplished by a pattern of finishing what one begins. A child can learn valuable life lessons when he fulfills his commitment at times that his interest has waned. During such occasions, character develops. Time management and organization is a major work of the elementary school years. A child needs parents and teachers to teach him how to plan his work (goals) and work his plan (specific objectives). When tasks seem overwhelming, children need to know to break the task into more manageable pieces and attack one part at a time.

How Home Environment Nurtures the Positive Identity Formation of Children

Home environments nurture the positive formation of children through effective communication skills, consistency and accountability, and by establishing a value clarifying atmosphere. Parents have control over these building blocks which help children to grow in initiative and industry, the major psycho-social function of the elementary school aged child. Effective communication skills center around presence, attention, eye contact, a connection via special name or special touch, and interactive conversation. How does the parent or teacher know that a child received the intended communication? Does the adult secure a child's attention before speaking?; expect recognition or acknowledgment when he addresses a child?; have evidence that a child heard him? Can the child re-state an adequate interpretation of the conversation or follow the direction given and respond appropriately to the verbal communication? During behavior-related discussions do the parent and child determine mutual definitions of the terms involved in the behavior scenario so that they are speaking the same language and getting a mutual meaning? The tone of a parent voice conveys intention. Does the parent tone convey expectation or suggestion; direction or option? There is a difference between talking at a person or talking with a person. Only the latter has the potential of effectiveness!

When correction is needed or suggested by the teacher or a school situation, does the parent demonstrate active listening and "mirror" objectively? By mirroring a parent serves as an objective reflective surface to reveal back to the child the image that the child displays. In other words, the parent takes the role of a facilitator and through questioning helps the child to name his own behavior and choices and the effects that his behavior has caused. The child names the issue as opposed to the parent telling the child what issue is involved. The parent asks the child to identify why the parent or teacher might be displeased or concerned about the incident under discussion rather than merely telling the child that a behavior was unacceptable or unappreciated. Acknowledging one's own

choices and accepting responsibility for one's own choices leads to a sense of ownership. Only ownership makes personal change, growth, and improvement possible.

Consistency and Accountability are fundamental to character growth, security, autonomy, initiative, and industry. It is necessary that a child perceives that her parents say what they mean and mean what they say; that parents follow through on verbalized or understood decisions and the pre-advertised consequences; that parents establish reasonable limits, expectations, and structures; and that, on a regular basis, parents expect accountability and follow through from their child.

Character develops with repeated behaviors. A value clarifying atmosphere teaches children that choosing, prizing and repeated acting on a principle builds character and promotes positive self-esteem. Children need to be taught to choose a value or principle after thoughtful consideration of alternatives and awareness of possible consequences on each side of the issue or principle or value. True value decisions bring an experience of rightness with God, self respect, well-being and wholeness even if the choice includes pain and criticism. If truly a value, the child is proud to affirm the decision publicly and is unashamed of the choice. Finally, to become a value, the child needs to act on the decision so repeatedly that those who know her connect her with the value and come to expect it of her. This value clarifying process is an exercise in industry and results in ownership, integrity, positive self-esteem and character development. I submit that a value clarifier with a developing sense of security, autonomy, initiative, and industry who follows through with consistency will be ready to meet the many winds that blow without being blown over! A house build on a solid foundation cannot be destroyed.

Mechanics of School Behavior Related to Self-Esteem and School Achievement

In 1990 the *California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility* defined self-esteem as "Appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others."

(p.18) The school culture can best help children to increase positive self-esteem and academic achievement by teaching them to accept responsibility for their actions, choices and behavior, and owning behavior as opposed to shifting the blame to others or changing the emphasis and focus from self and the issue at hand to another topic. Respect for others as evidenced by self-control of speech and body toward other people, possessions, and self is foundational to growth in self-esteem. The respect that a child shows or fails to show to others reflects her own sense of self-respect. All people are made in the image of God and deserve my respect. My way of handling your things is my way of handling you. My way of using your name is my way of using you! Respect needs to be taught. Teachers and parents need to help a child to grow in the awareness that his projects, assignments, copybook or portfolio work, behavior, and personal appearance convey a message of his own personal opinion, valuing, appreciation and expectations for himself. It either deepens a positive sense within him or deepens a sense of inferiority. Therefore teachers help children by insisting on positive, personal best performance in all areas. A child's opinion is important; what she values is important; what she appreciates and the expectations she places on herself is important. Self-esteem begins with self! Teachers do students a great service by holding high expectations, assuming that the expectations are realistic. As in the case of a parent who does a homework assignment for a child, when a teacher waters down realistic expectations he conveys to the child that even he, the teacher, does not think that the child is capable of meeting the expectation. Such a practice undermines the development of initiative and industry within the child.

How the Elementary School Environment Can Support Positive Identity Formation

Teachers provide an atmosphere conducive to growth in initiative and industry by a variety of practices, which include but are not limited to the following suggestions. (1) Establish workable systems in the classroom and classwork that support success. Is there a standard for work, a way of handing in assignments and independent work, a procedure

for advertising upcoming assignments and homework requirements? (2) Be directive while new academic skills are being assimilated, give opportunities for student application of the skill under teacher supervision, and then fade out of the process so that the students are more and more in charge of their learning. Is your classroom teacher dominated or child centered? (3) Set realistic goals and expectations based on developmental readiness. If the homework assignment you are giving for a specified block of time at home were done in the classroom under teacher supervision, would the completion times match? (4) Teach children how to manage time and task completion. Demonstrate daily, weekly, and monthly calendar planning. Have periodic check-in points for large, long range projects. (5) Move towards increasing independence within the student. (6) Equip children with the skills needed to achieve classroom expectations. For example, if you assign a term paper, have you previously taught the skills involved: outlining, research cards, bibliographical format, and footnoting format? (7) Hold children accountable for the following mechanics of school practices: careful completion of assignments; submitting requirements on due date; completing assignments with grade-appropriate spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and complete sentences without cross-outs or extensive use of white out; assigned work that meets the standards taught and required of the grade level; return parent-signed notices on due date; demonstrating the skill of listening by following the direction given, being able to repeat the spoken message, or being able to re-word the spoken message into other words that convey the same meaning; finishing responsibilities and activities once begun; demonstrating follow through on teacher requests and suggestions; and responding to RSVP-type of communications. (8) Provide application opportunity, exercise, practice of skills needed for developmental tasks via classwork, independent work, and homework. In summary, when a teacher equips the student for successful completion of a task; then assists the student to successfully apply the necessary skills; then expects successful completion and requires it, the child experiences satisfaction at the successful completion of the assigned task. Consequently, the child feels good about

herself and has a growing confidence in her ability to accomplish. Success begets success and furthers growth in industry.

In conclusion, it needs to be stated that there may be exceptions to every practice suggested in this paper but caution is called for so that exceptions do not become the rule! It is the experience of this researcher that too many children lack a positive sense of initiative and industry which makes them feel inferior and dislike who they are. The work of identity is the major work of our life. If we have a well formed identity which solidifies in the high school and early college years, we will be able to deal with the vicissitudes of life and the graces of life. But without a well formed identity we will go through our adult life handicapped and handicapping. The consistent effort of parent and teacher is needed to support the whole person formation of the children entrusted to our care.

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